The
Ballarat
Naturalist

August 2008

Trailing Goodenia
Goodenia lanata
(Club Logo)

.Honeyeaters

Speaker: Greg Binns Club Member

Honeyeaters are a group of birds so common in our bush that we risk taking them for granted, yet they are very varied in size, colouring, calls and behaviour. They are Passeriformes, belonging to the *Meliphagidae* family, meaning "honey" and "eat" in Greek. Graeme Pizzey described them as "our strongest endemic family". While some, such as the Eungella honeyeater are very restricted in their geographical spread, others such as the Singing Honeyeater are very widespread. Four are endemic to Tasmania. In total we have 68 species.

Honeyeaters occur in every main vegetational zone and are adapted with various types of bill and feeding habits owing to the dominance of nectar-producing, insect-attracting and ornithophilus (i.e depending on birds for cross-pollination) shrubs and trees. In particular the *Myrtaceae* flora have nectar-bearing flowers and often inedible fruits.

- **Bills** – slender, pointed, downward-curving, depending on the feeding habit of individual species, often intended for probing into tubular flowers.
- **Tongue** – Long extensible tongue with brushy tips and a fine split enabling the tongue to curl round to form a tube for sucking nectar.
- **Legs** – short, feet strongly developed for hanging in acrobatic positions when feeding.
- **Feathers** – all have 10 primaries in the wing, long tails, pointed wings.

Feeding – aggressive, active feeders; a high energy diet includes nectar, manna, sap, fruits and insects for protein (later in the day when the nectar supply is depleted).

Greg illustrated his talk with slides borrowed from the BOCA library; beginning with the **Yellow Wattlebird** as the largest – 48cm long, and the smallest, the **Scarlet Honeyeater** only 11 cm, Greg gave us a means of comparison; he had chosen to illustrate those species which were regularly found in our area, plus visitors. Then we saw one of our commonest birds, the **Red Wattlebird**, a bold and noisy species often found in our gardens which eats large insects. The **New Holland Honeyeater** is fond of banksias, is capable of catching several insects to hold and take back to the nest, and will breed all year round. **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** migrate in large flocks(>100 birds) as far as Cairns.

White-plumed Honeyeaters like redgums and are often found along creeks, are widespread, have a wide-ranging diet and often host cuckoo species! The **Fuscous Honeyeater** is common, often found in large numbers e.g. at Mt. Beckworth. The **White-eared Honeyeater** (here Greg imitated its call) has a stronger bill to catch insects, and instead of probing tubular flowers, pierces the base of them to seek the nectar – so no pollination takes place! **White-naped Honeyeaters** are very distinctive with red skin around the eye and brown legs, which distinguish it from the **Black-chinned Honeyeater** which has blue eye-skin and orange legs. The **Brown-headed Honeyeater** is a drab bird, feeding in small flocks and working vertically up the tree trunks like a tree-creeper, in search of insects.

The **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** has a brilliant yellow throat and head and a strong bill. The **Crescent Honeyeater** is occurring more often in the Ballarat area now, while the **Painted Honeyeater** is a visitor to the drier areas north of the Divide and likes Mistletoe particularly. It is nomadic, following the flowering of that species, and is therefore an effective spreader of Mistletoes. Perhaps more well-known to us is the **Eastern Spinebill** with its longer curved bill to tackle bell-shaped flowers like Correas which other Honeyeaters cannot access.

A strong, pugnacious species is the **Noisy Miner**, a lover of insects and very territorial. We can also include the **Silvereye** – not a member of the *Meliphagidae* but nevertheless eats nectar, insects and fruit. They migrate in their thousands from Tasmania to Queensland, a distance of 1500 Km.

Rarer visitors to our region include the **Black Honeyeater**, a nomadic dry-country bird which has appeared at Clunes and builds a shallow, flimsy nest low down in the open. The **Regent Honeyeater** is a large aggressive species seen at Mt. Cole and Newstead. It is known to defend its feeding trees but can also be a pest in cultivated fruit crops. There have been periodic reports of **White-fronted Honeyeaters** at Newlyn – again it is a nomadic bird. The **Singing Honeyeater** has been seen west of Ballarat and is widely distributed except for the east coast and Top End.

A most distinctive bird is the **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** which prefers heathland and will forage on bare ground. It sings from the top of a bush or tree and has a fluttering flight. It has been seen at Skipton, Mt. Pleasant, Canadian and Mt. Cole. The **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater** is recognised by the pink lower half of its face and beak. Recognised as a useful insect destroyer, it also likes nectar and berries including Mistletoe.

Given appropriate conditions we could perhaps see any of the following: the **Noisy Friarbird,** a large bird which congregates in noisy flocks to feed; it can be a pest to horticulturalists who once shot it! The **Little Wattlebird** (as its name suggests, the smallest of the Wattlebirds but has no wattles!) loves Banksia nectar and like its cousins is an aggressive feeder. The **Blue-faced Honeyeater** is another big species, 24-30cm long and will eat bananas and pears. It is inclined to use the ready-built nests of Babblers or to use them as a nest foundation.

Finally, the **Helmeted Honeyeater,** the Victorian avian emblem and which is the largest and most brilliantly coloured of the yellow-tufted species. It is confined to the Cardinia and Beaconsfield areas of the state and is the subject of captive breeding programs with releases taking place often in the Yellingbo area.

Greg's wide experience of bird-watching, both in geographical spread and number of observations, enabled him to provide us with many anecdotes which brought his talk alive as he spoke at firsthand about all these birds and often illustrated their calls. We will look more carefully at these characteristically Australian birds in future.

Carol Hall

Excursion: Linton Trust for Nature Block 6th July 2008

Leader: John Gregurke

Ten members ventured forth to the TFN block off the Glenelg Highway just beyond Linton. We were armed with hoes, pick-axes, spades and secateurs intent on cleaning the block of invasive species as well as checking off the late Pat Murphy's plant list. Thistles were anticipated but no – hardly one – only *Acacia longifolis* (Coast Wattle) and *A. baileyana* (Cootamundra Wattle). Both are Australian natives which might take over the block if left unchecked. Sizeable bushes were cut down, and also specimens of the introduced gorse, briar rose, blackberry and lavender were dug out throughout the day.

This block (or reserve) of 22 ha (55 acres). was acquired by the then named Victorian Conservation Trust (now TFN) in 1975 with assistance from the Government of Victoria and donations from local residents and groups. The TFN is Trustee of the property. The block is regarded as a sanctuary for native flora and fauna and is a significant remnant of the local vegetation. It has not been burnt or grazed within memory. It is an excellent study area for naturalists. On-going general maintenance of the block is undertaken by local members of a Management Committee and the FNCB. These activities have full approval of TFN. (Thanks to Greg Binns for supplying this information).

A full list of native (and some introduced) plants identified is appended. We were particularly impressed with the deep red blooms of the Common Correa, and Spreading Wattle was also in full flower. Bird life was practically non-existent today.

About mid-afternoon we departed the block for Flagstaff Hill Scenic Reserve further west along the Glenelg Highway. An observation tower has been built (opened 2003) and the site developed. From the top of the tower, though it was windy but clear, we saw in the distance peaks such as Mt. William (the Grampians), Mt. Langi Ghiran and Mt. Cole, Mt. Buninyong and Mt. Warrenheip, Mt. Elephant and the Otways. In a flash we saw country – part of Australia Felix – which Major Mitchell had traversed in months in 1836. This brought our day to a close.

Tony Johns.

Plant List for Linton TFN Block 6/07/08

A. acinacea	Gold-dust Wattle
A. aculeatissima	Thin-leaf Wattle
A. dealbata	Silver Wattle
A. genistifolia	Spreading Wattle
A. mearnsii	Black Wattle
A. melanoxylon	Blackwood
A. paradoxa	Hedge Wattle
Acaena novae-zelandiae	Bidgee-widgee
Acrotriche serrulata	Honeypots
Allocasuarina littoralis	Black Sheoak
Amyena pendula ssp.pendula	Drooping Mistletoe
Astroloma humifusum	Cranberry Heath
Bossiaea prostrata	Creeping Bossiaea
Briza maxima	Large Quaking Grass
Brunonia australis	Blue Pincushion
Burchardia umbellata	Milkmaids
Cassinia arcuata	Drooping Cassinia
Cassytha pubescens	Downy Dodder-laurel
Chrysocephalum apiculatum	Common Everlasting
Correa reflexa var. reflexa	Common Correa
Daviesia leptophylla	Slender Bitter-pea
Dianella revoluta var. revoluta	Black-anther Flax Lily
Drosera whittakeri	Scented Sundew
E. aromaphloia	Scentbark
E. baxteri	Brown Stringybark
E. obliqua	Messmate Stringybark
E. ovata var. ovata	Swamp Gum
E. viminalis ssp. viminalis	Manna Gum
Exocarpus cupressiformis	Cherry Ballart
Gonocarpus tetragynus	Common Raspwort
Goodenia lanata	Trailing Goodenia
Hardenbergia violaceae	Purple Coral Pea
Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire Fog
Hovea heterophylla	Common Hovea
Hydrocotyle laxiflora	Stinking Pennywort
Hypochoeris radicata	Flatwood
Lomandra filiformis ssp. coriacea	Wattle Mat-rush
Oxalis perennans	Wood Sorrel

Pimelea linifolia *ssp. linifolia*	Slender Rice-flower
Plantago varia	Small Plantain
Platylobium obtusangulum	Common Flat-pea
Poa sieberiana var. sieberiana	Tussock Grass
Pteridium esculentum	Bracken
Pterostylis melagramma	Tall Greenhood
Pterostylis nutans	Nodding Greenhood
Pultanaea gunni ssp. gunni	Golden Bush-pea
Rosa rubiginosa	Sweet Briar
Sonchus oleraceus	Sow Thistle
Tetratheca ciliata	Pink Bells
Themeda triandra	Kangaroo Grass
Thysanotus pattersonii	Twining Fringe-lily
Vulpia bromoides	Squirrel-tail Fescue
Xanthorrhoea minor *ssp. lutea*	Small Grasstree

ANN Get-together Northern Territory May 2008

90 naturalists from all over Australia gathered at Mary River Park, 100 km south east of Darwin, for the fifth Get-together. The 9-day program was organised by the Northern Territory Field Naturalists Club. Many familiar faces were recognised as well as people who were attending their first Get-together.

Highlights included:

- Visits to Kakadu and Mary River National Parks.
- Territory Wildlife Park where we could get up close to many of the mammals, birds and reptiles which we had only seen fleetingly in the wild.
- Fogg Dam, water storage for a failed agricultural development, which is now home to many species of birds and butterflies.
- Ian Morris, naturalist and author, who has lived in the Top End for 40 years, willingly shared his knowledge of plants, animals, geology, parks management, aboriginal culture and much more.
- Monsoon forest habitat with so many new plant and bird species.
- The call of a pair of Barking Owls heard around the camping area each night.
- The extensive cool burns which are lit late in the afternoon during early dry season to prevent large, hot, wild fires later in the dry season. The recovery of the flood plains of Kakadu in the 20 years since water

buffalo have been controlled.

Chinchilla Field Naturalists in the Darling Downs of Queensland will host the next ANN Get-together on 24 August to 3 September 2010.

John Gregurke

The Ballarat contingent lunching at Margaret River

Highlights listed on the SEANA Website by Ern Perkins

- Meeting with some of the indigenous people, and learning something of their knowledge, their culture, and their care for country.
- Seeing the NT eucalypts. Unlike eucalypts in southern Australia, on which there are usually both buds and fruit, the NT eucalypts drop these seasonally. A good deal of time was spent scratching on the ground for buds or fruit. Frequent burning helped to make fallen material scarce.
- The abundance of large paperbarks, some of which were taller than the eucalypts. In the south, most melaleucas are in the shrub layer.
- The vast extent of the superficially similar savannah woodlands. On each visit more and more variation become apparent.
- The amount of burning taken place. The fires, lit in afternoon, extinguish themselves during the night. Burning in the south needs much closer monitoring.

- The birds. Some of the NT birds are very familiar in southern States. These include Magpie Larks, the Galahs and Corellas, most of the raptors, and many of the water birds. Others were completely new.
- The plants, unlike the birds, were almost totally new. The familiar River Red Gums, and Kangaroo Grass made up a tiny minority of southern species. Even the weeds were unfamiliar.

The evidence of immense volumes of water during the wet season.

Notes taken from two of our evening talks

Termites

Termites are social creatures but closer related to cockroaches than other social insects. Most termites in the colony are workers and are sterile. Their eyes aren't properly developed , they harvest food and feed the nursery. The soldiers are also sterile, blind and defend the colony The termite's diet is mainly the digestion of dead plants and wood.

Termite mounds vary greatly in shape, some are also hidden underground and others are in trees (arboreal). Cathedral mounds can be above six metres in height. A functioning colony can exist for maybe one hundred years . Then the mound disintegrates.

The *magnetic termite mounds* are found in flat areas that get flooded. The spine points to the North South axis. Average height is two metres but can be up to four metres.

Why the shape?

Thermo regulation. Temperatures can go down to four degrees at dawn with mists. The colony needs temperatures in the high twenties to operate effectively. The mound is not built underground as many others are. At midday (the hottest part of the day) the mound is not getting much direct sun. The afternoon sun warms the west side, but the east side stays warm

into the day.
How do they align the mounds?
They are blind. They build mainly in the wet season and work from within the mound. They definitely use the magnetic field- an inherited genetic bearing. A stable magnetic field in the northern Australia may have influenced this.

Bamboo

There is only one species of bamboo indigenous to the Territory. This was growing by Mary River and was about to flower. The bamboo only flowers after long periods eg. twenty eight years. All plants in an area synchronise with the flowering. They drop their seeds and then all the plants in that area die. The flowering seems to be in waves across different areas.
What purpose should this serve?
The seedlings are light dependant. With all the plants dying at once, canopy gaps would be provided to enhance their contact with light.
The flowering is driven by a biological clock, but it is not a simple clock. Do temperature fluctuations contribute? If there are miscounts, the flowering would be permanently out of sync with other groups.

Val Hocking

For more photos and information on the ANN gathering visit the SEANA website as seen below

SEANA Website

http://home.vicnet.net.au/~seana/

A good website on frogs

The site includes photos, decription, distribution maps and calls. The first URL covers all of Australia and the second just has the frogs found in Victoria.

http://frogs.org.au/
http://frogs.org.au/frogs/state_frogs.php?state_key=64

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Incorporated

No. A0014919P ABN 13 150 403 135

Minutes of the General Meeting 4th July 2008.

Opening and Apologies.

The Vice-president, Greg Binns, opened the meeting and welcomed 18 members and visitors.

Apologies were received from John Morrish, Peter and Claire Dalman, Fran and Les Hanrahan, John Mildren, Ken and Del McDonnell, Val Hocking, Margaret Martin, and Dulcie Brooke.

Minutes of previous meeting were summarised in the Ballarat Naturalist and tabled.

Accepted as read on the motion of Ken Hammond, Seconded: Nina Netherway.

Business Arising from previous minutes:
nil.

Correspondence.

IN

Trust for Nature: Conservation Bulletin Issue 40, April 2008
Enfield Forest Alliance: Notice of AGM and subscription request ($10 per year).
Environment Victoria: Membership renewal request, $25 for groups less than 50.
Environment Victoria: Green Action News Issue 4, Winter 2008.
CastlemaineFNC: Castlemaine Naturalist, May, June & July 2008.
Geelong FNC: Geelong Naturalist, July 2008.
Threatened Species Network: TSN News, Winter 2008
FNCV: Field Nats News No 177, July 2008; The Victorian Naturalist Vol 125(3), June 2008
Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria: Affiliated Club membership, $20.
Bush Heritage Australia: Bush Heritage News, Winter 2008.

OUT:

Geoff Lay: Reminder of August 1st speaker arrangements.
DSE: Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change Green Paper response prepared by Peter Dalman.
Environment Victoria: Membership renewal.
Enfield Forest Alliance: Subscription.

Business Arising from Correspondence:
Environment Victoria subscription & Enfield Forest Alliance subscription

approved at Committee meeting.

That Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria Affiliated Club membership, $20, be paid.
Moved: Carol Hall; Seconded: Eileen Anderson. Carried.

Reports

Treasurer's Report: Opening Balance $4679.44, Income: $48.80, Expenses: $160.73, Closing Balance: $4564.51.
Moved: Helen Burgess; Seconded Tony Johns. Carried.

Lake Burrumbeet Advisory Committee: Greg Binns and John Gregurke reported that a Latrobe University post graduate student is doing a hydrological study of Lake Burrumbeet has found that a significant amount of water is lost by infiltration into a deep lead below the lake. Shallow water is supporting a large number of ducks and swans.

Field Reports

Elspeth Swan: Plains Wander found by hunters dog at Little River handed in to Museum of Victoria.

Paul Norquay: New Holland Honeyeater collecting nest material at Mt Egerton. Nodding Greenhoods flowering but fewer numbers than previous years.

Belinda Taylor: Weeping Grass flowering at Corinhap.

Margaret Thomas: Crimson Rosellas attracted to feeders in garden.

Ken Hammond: Black-chinned, Fuscous and White-plumed Honeyeaters seen at Clunes during a visit with Frank Harrap and Ken McDonnell.

Carol Hall: During June, 3 Freckled Duck on the Swan Pool at Lake Wendouree.

Excursion Arrangements: Meet at Ballarat Market Place to leave at 9.30am for Trust for Nature Block at Linton. Working bee to remove weeds and inspect fences. Leader: John Gregurke.

Syllabus Item: Greg Binns *"Honeyeaters"*. Greg spoke on the characteristics of this important group of Australian birds and showed slides of the species found in the Ballarat region. He included many anecdotes gathered during a lifetime of birding. Carol Hall thanked Greg and present him with a hamper

Supper

CALENDAR

August

Fri 1 Geoff Lay—FNCV —Fungi

Sun 3 Tullaroop

September

Fri 5th Wattles of the Ballarat Region—club members

Sat 6th Mt Cole– Dr Fran Hanrahan– club member

Club Campout Inglewood 19th – 21st September

Have you booked your accommodation for our Inglewood Club Camp?

Book at Inglewood Motel and Caravan Park

Ph.

Committee

President.......................... Mr Peter Dalman
Vice-President .... Mr Greg Binns
Secretary.......................... Mr John Gregurke
Treasurer.......................... Mr Les Hanrahan

Miss Helen Burgess..................
Mrs Carol Hall ....
Mr John Morrish ....
Mrs Claire Dalman...................
Mrs Val Hocking.......................
Ms Nina Netherway (editor)......

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Meetings are held at Ballarat Horticultural Centre, cnr. Gregory & Gillies Sts (VicRoads 254 F8) on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm.

Excursions: Depart from Ballarat Market Place (formerly Creswick Plaza) Creswick Rd., Ballarat (VicRoads 255 M10) at 9.30am unless otherwise specified.

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